

**California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley
Kern County Public Forum
Bakersfield, CA – March 9, 2006**

Government Panel

Ron Drummond – Executive Director, Kern County Council of Governments (COG)

- Best plan for cooperation is having the current panel continue for up to two more years.
- The 8 Valley COGs are organizing to speak with one voice.
- The COG's are working on a blueprint for the Valley that covers a number of areas the Partnership is working on:
 - They will need assistance with air quality and water issues
- Top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Improve Highway 99.
 - Improve the railroad system:
 - Fix the bottle neck issues that freight cars experience
 - Create a direct route to the Los Angeles area
 - Develop a high speed rail system
 - Improve Education.

Ray Watson – Co-Chair, Kern County Board of Supervisors

- A transportation plan should include a high speed rail system.
- Funding for indigent care impacts the Valley counties – the Valley needs help from the State and Federal governments.
- Need a better education system.
- The Partnership needs to continue for the Valley to fix its problems.

Alan Krauter– County of Kern, County Administrative Office

- Top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Clean air – the regulations imposed on the Valley restrict growth.
 - Affordable housing – the Valley has limited affordable housing.
 - Education – Focus on higher education and vocational education.

Larry Rider - Kern County Superintendent of Education

- Students need to be better prepared for college.
- There needs to be economic diversity in the Valley.
- Top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Funding for schools.
 - Continue with higher education development.
 - Funding for infrastructure development.

Business Panel

Patrick Collins – President & CEO, Kern Economic Development Corporation

- Regulation:
 - Lawmakers do not understand how laws and regulations impact the Valley.
 - For example, SB 975 creates a prevailing wage requirement in any construction project where there is a local government incentive:
 - This law added \$7 million to a proposed project.
 - This is an example of how lawmakers don't recognize local and regional impact.
- Transportation:
 - Build roads that lead to jobs.
- Workforce:
 - Focus on vocational education because the large majority of the workforce in the Valley will not attend college.
 - Consider preschool and early reading development programs.

Debbie Moreno – President & CEO, The Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce

- Transportation:
 - Widen and improve Highway 99.
 - Rail systems for freight need to be improved.
- Air quality:
 - The Valley is doing what it can and is following regulations:
 - Unfortunately, regulations imposed by the EPA are one size fits all.
 - The Valley's air problems are regional and regulations should be regional.
 - Pollution is caused by a small minority of companies. Efforts should be focused on those companies in order to be more cost effective.
- Education:
 - Quality education produces a quality workforce.
 - Efforts should be made to reach out to families because stronger family involvement means a better chance to succeed.
 - Preschool helps prepare children for success in schooling.
 - The need for vocational education cannot be over emphasized.

Keith Brice – President, Mid State Development Corporation

- Small business is an important aspect of the Valley.
- One of small businesses biggest problems is finding an educated work force:
 - There needs to be an emphasis on improving vocational education programs.
- Enterprise Zones do not provide enough incentives to business, and the Partnership should reconsider how an Enterprise Zone gives incentives.
- Top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Air Quality.
 - Water.
 - Higher Educational and Vocational Education.
- The Partnership should be proactive about this plan and not let it sit on the shelf.

Lou Gomez – Executive Director, Kern County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

- Agriculture is the backbone of the Valley economy and the Valley is losing agricultural land.
- Vocational education is a necessity – it is important to have education programs to retrain those who lose their agricultural jobs.
- Affordable housing is a problem.
- The Great Valley Center should be the lead in implementing the Partnership's plan.

Mike Turnipseed – Executive Director, Kern County Tax Payers Association

- The state needs to stop collecting the Education Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) from small towns, and return the \$680 million tax dollars to Kern County.
- The State must honor its commitments to local government:
 - Local governments are not being reimbursed by the State.
 - Local governments don't have the resources to not be reimbursed.
 - This directly impacts local funding for libraries and police.

David Parker – Executive Vice President, Kern County Foundation

- The scope of the work panels is broad enough but there should be priorities.
- Highway 99 needs to be expanded and improved.
- Top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Highway 99 – separate cars and trucks.
 - Target industries – create a region wide industry network.
 - A model for collaboration and cooperation among the Valley counties.
- Collaboration and cooperation is best continued by keeping the current Partnership structure.

Follow up questions/comments:

What suggestions do you have for improving Enterprise Zones?

More incentives for educated work force and interest rate buy downs.

What is wrong with industry coming to the Valley and replacing or adding to agricultural jobs?

Nothing is wrong with industry. The problem is retraining the work force for the new jobs.

Community Panel

Dr. Bill Andrews – President, Bakersfield College

- Students are not aware of the possible jobs and paths to follow outside of college
- Create a technology education center
 - The center would help provide internship opportunities for technical education and work with intermediate and high school students in showing alternative opportunities to college
- Creating more opportunities for technology will help keep an educated workforce in the Valley

Dana Karcher – The Tree Foundation of Kern County

- The top three priorities for the Valley:
 - Do not follow the old model for doing things in the Valley: change the focus of planning and entrepreneurship opportunities
 - Raise future leaders for the Valley
 - Education, schools and family support will create the foundation for future leaders
 - Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate – the 8 counties need to constantly communicate and discuss issues plaguing their community

Holly Hart – Smart Growth Foundation

- Public outreach needs to be more of a focus in the Valley.
- The Valley needs to find a voice that can be heard by California.
- G.I.S. – Geographic Integration System – A system that integrates the views, voices and issues of the Valley.
- An infrastructure plan should include broadband and internet accessibility.

Steve Sanders – Community Connection for Child Care

- Early education opportunities should be available for all children.
 - This will help them prepare for school and life.
- Child care is as important to the Valley as infrastructure.
- Government, communities and businesses should collaborate to establish ways to further child care.

Follow up questions/comments:

Programs such as Future Farmers of America are essential to the getting young students involved and focused on a career path.

The basic skills for education, such as math, should be taught in connection with the vocational education training in order to help students learn and understand better.

Community colleges are the backbone to California education.

Need to develop a strategy for community crime.

Art Vogner – Kern County Sierra Club

- A farmland conservancy program should be implemented
- Develop a better infrastructure for railroad system

Carla Edwards – Fresno County Farm Bureau

- Farmland needs more representation in the Partnership
- Bring in industries that include agriculture or work with agriculture